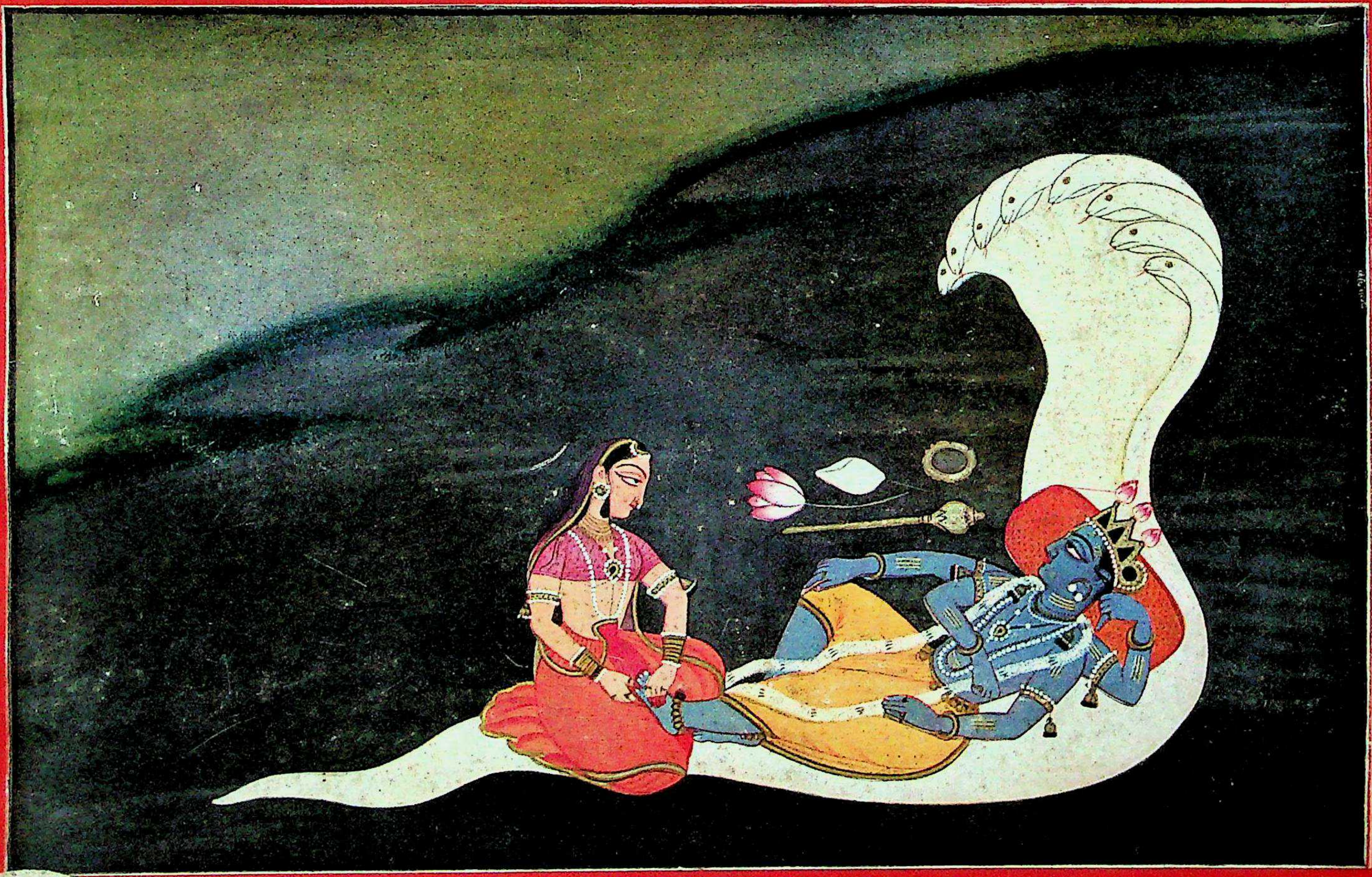
GEETA GOVIND
in
BASOHLI SCHOOL
of
INDIAN PAINTING



2127

FOREWORD BY
DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD
PRESIDENT OF INDIA

INTRODUCTION BY
R. P. N. SINHA

STATE MUSEUM, LUCKNOW
LIBRARY

Acc. No. ______________

Book No. ______________

12.50
103
75995

GEETA GOVIND IN BASOHLI SCHOOL OF INDIAN PAINTING

State Museum Library
Lucknow

BALKRISHNA BOOK Co.,
Hazratganj, Lucknow

STATE MUSEUM, LUCKNOW
LIBRARY
Acc. No.
Book No.
759.954

12.50
103

GEETA GOVIND IN BASOHLI SCHOOL OF INDIAN PAINTING

State Museum Library Lucknow

BALKRISHNA BOOK Co.,
Hazratganj, Lucknow

GEETA GOVIND
in
BASOHLI SCHOOL
of
INDIAN PAINTING

FOREWORD BY
DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD
PRESIDENT OF INDIA

•

INTRODUCTION BY
R. P. N. SINHA

OXFORD BOOK & STATIONERY CO., NEW DELHI & CALCUTTA
D. B. TARAPOREVALA SONS & CO., (PRIVATE) LTD., BOMBAY

759.954
S G

राज्य संग्रहालय पुस्तकालय, लखनऊ
क्रमसंख्या 2127
प्राप्ति तिथि 12.2.65
State Museum, Library, Lko.

Published by S. H. Primlani for Oxford Book & Stationery Co. New Delhi & Calcutta.
Text Printed by Hind Paper Printers, 79-9, Lower Circular Road, Calcutta-14.
Colour Plates Printed by Studio Nash (P) Ltd., Ripon Street, Calcutta.
Cover designed by Allan Rae, Camac Street, Calcutta.

RASHTRAPATI NIWAS,
SIMLA

A most characteristic feature of mystic experiences is that they are universal. In all ages and all times there have been saints testifying to the truth of mystic relationship between the human soul and Divinity. The human soul's yearning for God or the Supreme Being provides the basis for this relationship of love. The intensity of emotion roused by unfathomable devotional urge transcends all carnal desires as the common people understand it. The thirst of the soul for union with the object of devotion is limitless, so that this yearning alone seems real and all else fades out of the ken of the devotee's consciousness.

It is this irresistible yearning and sublime bliss of the mystic union which made the Gopis of Vrindaban break all barriers, mental and social, in their pursuit of Lord Krishna. The love of the Gopis, Radha being principal among them, for Krishna has presented for the people of this country for ages a practical ideal of devotion and divine attachment. This has been the theme of a large number of literary works in our literature. 'Geeta Govind' of Jayadeva is acknowledgedly one of the best among them. By virtue of the excellence of its poetry, its mystic and its devotional fervour 'Geeta Govind' has had a profound effect on our Bhakti literature and thought. The story of the Gopis' love for Krishna did not inspire poets alone. It also inspired in an equal measure sculptors, painters and other artists.

Shri Rajeshwar Prasad Narayan Sinha has done well in collecting and reproducing in a compact form the paintings illustrating the theme of 'Geeta Govind' belonging to what is known as the Basohli school. This collection provides a new angle for studying the great work of Jayadeva. I am glad Shri Rajeshwar Prasad Narayan Sinha has also written a comprehensive introduction which will serve as the background and also give the right perspective for a study of these paintings.

Rajendra Prasad
16.5.58.

Geeta Govind in Basohli Painting

I

IT is said that one morning, when the sun was yet to rise and the sweet ambrosial breeze of the Spring season laden with fragrance of mango blossoms was blowing in a languid manner, the great Saint Chaitanya, during his last days in Puri, was slowly moving down to the temple of Lord Jagannath, when suddenly he heard someone singing in a melodious voice:

ललितलवंगलतापरिशीलनकोमलमलयसमीरे,
मधुकरनिकरकरम्बितकोकिलकूजितकुंजकुटीरे,
विहरति हरिरिह सरसवसन्ते,
नृत्यति युवतिजनेन समं सखि, विरहिजनस्य दुरन्ते।

"I know where Krishna tarries in these early days of Spring,
When every wind from warm Malay brings fragrance on its wing;
Brings fragrance stolen far away from thickets of the clove.
In jungles where the bees hum and the 'Koil' flutes her love;
He dances with dancers, of a merry morrice one,
All in the budding Spring-time, for 'tis sad to be alone."

So deeply charmed was he that he ran to embrace the singer in ecstasy but was prevented from doing so by his companions. And thus an awkward situation was averted for the singer was a woman, a '*Devadasi*'[1] returning from the temple, and Chaitanya a *Sanyasi*, pledged not to touch a woman.

Such is the fascination which every word of that great devotional lyric, *Geeta Govind* has for human ears. Sir Edwin Arnold called it the 'song of songs' and there is no denying that in sweetness, poetic beauty, expressiveness, choice of words and in fact all that goes to make a great lyric, *Geeta Govind* is unsurpassed. Few poetical compositions have ever acquired such an abiding place in the hearts of men as this poem of medieval India. For centuries the temples of this country and the courts of kings have hummed its melodious music. It has fascinated even foreigners, which is evident from the various translations made of it in verse by the poets of European languages, Latin, English, German and French.

It constituted a landmark in the art of the composition of devotional lyrics[2] in this country and had tremendous impact on the imagination of devotional poets; amongst those who trod the footprints of Jayadeva, its author, we recall the names of Vidyapati and Chandidas, poets of great eminence in the world of devotional poetry. *Geeta Govind* was to them the fountain-source of the Krishnabhakti cult.

Poet Jayadeva was born in a small village of Bengal, called Kindu Villwa, which falls now in the district of Birbhum. The year of his birth is not known. It is, however, commonly supposed that he was born some time in the eleventh century A.D., when the Sena dynasty ruled in Bengal and a Khil ji King sat on the throne of Delhi. The name of his father was Bhojdeva and that of his mother, Ramadevi. Both died when he was very young. He married Padmavati whose hand was offered to him under a tree in Puri by her father, a man of deep devotional bent, under a direction from Lord Jagannath, given to him in a vision. Padmavati, too, was a woman of a high religious temperament. The union proved to be very happy and the wife was a source of inspiration to the poet.

Shortly after, he undertook a tour of Vrindavan (where Lord Krishna spent the early years of his life) and neighbouring places. It is said that when he visited Jaipur he was wounded by some dacoits. Returning home, he stayed at the court of the then King of Bengal. Jayadeva's wife predeceased him. Legend has it that on one occasion when he was away, the wife of the King whose court he adorned, jokingly told Padmavati that Jayadeva was dead. So deep was Padmavati's sorrow, it is said, that she fell down dead. Jayadeva, when he heard of it, could not bear the terrible shock, and he left for his village, where he spent the rest of his life in loneliness.

II

Jayadeva wrote his immortal lyric when he was in Puri. It acquired great fame even during his life-time and was sung all over India; but more especially in the South, where even today it maintains its ancient popularity. George Keyt has rightly said that 'as a love poem *Geeta Govind* stands unrivalled in Indian literature'. The mystic love of Radha and Krishna has been described here in worldly imagery, for there is no other way in which it could be described. But the poet has by his cryptic remarks left no doubt as to the spiritual content

of it; in fact it is the yearning of the human soul to mingle with the Divine that is decribed in a metaphorical manner. It is—

'The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow'

that is the basis of all *gopi* love. That is how the deep pangs of separation which the *gopis* experienced become understandable. The fact that the cowherd Krishna was not even eight years of age when the love-drama was enacted in Vrindavan, with which his name is so closely associated, is sufficient to cast aside all doubts of there being anything carnal about it. We ought not to forget that of all men and women in Vrindavan it was only the *gopis* who were permitted to participate in it; them alone the love of Krishna, who was an incarnation of the Supreme Spirit, drove to infatuation. It is said in one of the Upanishads (*Mundak*)—

नायमात्मा प्रवचनेन लभ्यो,
न मेधया न बहुना श्रुतेन,
यमेवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्य—
स्तस्यैष आत्मा विवृणुते तनुं स्वाम् ।

'It is not through discourses, nor intellectual faculties or listening to other's preachings that He, the Supreme Spirit, is reached. He is tangible only to those whom He selects and to those alone He opens Himself out.'

There is no denying that the *gopis* of Vraj were such beings. When the time came for Him to bless them with celestial love, Krishna played on his flute, in the forest of Vrindavan, while tending his cows, and such was the impact of its magic, that they, the *gopis*, ran after him, each one as she was, dressed, half-dressed, leaving behind work unfinished and babies unfed, to meet him in the forest. And this was the beginning of the love-dramas he enacted and which continued till he left for Mathura and thereafter, for Dwaraka, never to come again. The lure was irresistible. Says Radha, the greatest amongst them—

न मूर्खधीरस्मि न वा दुराग्रहा,
शरीरभोगेषु न चातिलालसा,
किन्तु व्रजाधीश सुतस्य ते गुणा,
बलादपस्मारदशां नयन्ति माम् ।

'I am not a fool, nor obstinate, nor have I any desire for carnal pleasures. But there is something in that son of the King of Vraj which drives me into a state of hypnosis.'

Whether they wanted it or not the *gopis* were drawn towards Krishna. The Divine Soul has a magnetic effect that attracts the human soul which, as the Upanishads say, is after all a spark of the ever-burning fire, a part and parcel of the Divine. The human soul is shrouded, as it were, in *samskar* mental impressions left by causes no longer operative and dating from a previous birth, and in too much attachment to the world in which it lives. During its sojourn of the present life it gathers moss and its original purity is hidden.

In the words of Lassen, the recollection of this celestial origin abides deep in the mind, and even when it seems to slumber—drugged, as it were, by the fair shows of the world, the pleasures of visible things, and the intoxication of the senses—it now and again awakes. Then the soul begins to discriminate and to perceive that the love which was its inmost principle has been lavished on empty and futile objects; it grows aweary of things sensual, false and unenduring; it longs to fix its affection on that which will be stable, and the source of true and eternal delight.

It is only through the grace of God and its own *sadhana* (spiritual endeavour) that the upper crust of the soul melts and it begins to feel the attraction, the love, which the moth feels for the star. Love is God; it is through love alone that we can reach Him. But this love is born only when He chooses to lure the human soul towards Him and unfold the petals of His charm, and the soul runs to Him as run the rivers towards the ocean.

Of all the incarnations of God, *avatars*, it is Krishna alone who is the repository of all sweetness (रसो वै सः) and has the quality of attracting others towards him, as the very name Krishna indicates (कर्षयतीति कृष्णः —Krishna is one who attracts), in an unbounded measure. It was natural, therefore, that the milkmaids of Vraj felt so strongly drawn towards him. And so did Meera in a later age.

An intense desire to possess and mingle is the truest characteristic of love, and this is love which a devotee feels for the object of his devotion. Naturally, therefore, to love God as a woman loves her beloved is considered the highest form of worship. This attitude has been designated by several names in Hindu devotional philosophy—**dampatyabhava, kantabhava, gopibhava, madhuryabhava, parkiyabhava** etc. all of which in the ultimate analysis mean the sweet feeling which a woman has for the object of her love. The highest personification of it is Radha. Such was the intensity of Radha's love for Krishna that both have become inseparable in the sense that we cannot conceive of Radha without Krishna or of Krishna without Radha. In fact Radha, according to Hindu conception, is the embodiment of *Prakrit*

(negative energy) and Krishna of *Purush* (positive energy) and both together go to make the whole. The one cannot exist without the other.

God's functions may be described as threefold. He is the principle of creative life, knowledge and delight. Delight is in beauty and love, and Krishna is the centre of both. Handsomest amongst the handsome is he, of whom Vidyapati, the immortal devotional poet of Mithila, said: "I have gazed at his face during the periods of my past successive births, but alas, the thirst of my eyes still remains unquenched".[4] Who was there, asks another poet, who was not charmed by Krishna's beauty? Even the herd of deer gathered round him when he played on his flute and like the milkmaids of Vrindavan stayed spellbound for hours. The beauty of the Supreme Spirit was epitomized in Krishna; small wonder then that his very look caused the springs of love and devotion to flow towards him, like rivers flowing towards the ocean. Annie Besant has very aptly put it as follows:

"When he who is beauty and love and bliss, sheds a little portion of Himself on earth, enclosed in human form, the weary eyes of men expand with a new hope and new vigour. They are irresistibly attracted to him. Devotion spontaneously springs up." This is a feeling that cannot be adequately expressed in words; it can only be felt. Nor can this be cultivated; it grows from within. To a devotee this is the very elixir of life.

But to experience this feeling one has to become a woman and feel as a wife for her husband. In the words of F. W. Newman, "if the soul is to go to higher spiritual blessedness, it must become woman—yes, however manly you may be among men."

And this is what is known as *madhuryabhava,* the sweet way of devotion, which the *gopis* experienced and most of our great saints and devotees, like Kabir, Nanak, Meerabai, Bejoy Krishna and others in our own time. This is regarded as the highest form of worship and is not unknown in other countries either.

The Sufis of the East and the Christian mystics of the West afford many examples of *madhuryabhava*. Says St. John of the Cross—

Upon my flowery breast
Wholly for Him and save Himself for none,

There did I give sweet rest
To my beloved one.
The fanning of the cedars breathed thereon.
All things I then forgot,
My cheek on Him who for my coming came,
All ceased and I was not,
Leaving my cares and shame
Among the lilies and forgetting them.

In the Songs of Solomon occur the following expressions:—

(1) Let him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth.
(2) Behold Thou art fair, my Beloved! Yea pleasant.
Also our bed is green.

* * * *

His left hand is under my head
And His right hand doth embrace me.
By night on my bed—I sought him
Whom my Soul loveth.

Says the celestial lover Mechtchild:

"The Soul thus spake to her Desire—'Fare forth and see where my love is; say to Him that I desire to love'. So desire sped forth (to the Lord) and cried, 'Lord! I would have thee know that my lady can no longer bear to live. If Thou wouldst flow forth to her, then might she swim; but the fish cannot long exist that is left stranded on the shore'. 'Go back', said the Lord, 'Bring to me that hungry soul, for it is in this alone that I take delight.'"

In St. Bernard we find a more clear expression:

'Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth'—Who is it that speaks these words? It is the Bride. Who is the Bride? 'It is the soul thirsting for God'.

The greatest example of this thirst is found among the milkmaids of Vrindavan, who, ever since they fell in love with Krishna, pined for union with him. Nothing would satisfy them except to see him and to hear him play on his flute. Scorning all barriers, mental and physical, of fear, shame, disgrace, family ties, moral and social obligations, they run to meet him on the cool banks of the Yamuna. Krishna tries to persuade them, that they should return to their homes, but to no effect: they persist in staying with him and when for a moment he disappears they are perturbed. He reappears and then is held the *Raas*, a group dance in which every milkmaid seems to experience the presence of her beloved by her side. Time seems to

be at a standstill and they lose all sense of the physical environment, and the complete union of the Human and the Divine is achieved.

This is the acme of *madhuryabhava* and none but he who has achieved it under His own grace can hope to enter into that sublime bliss of mystic union which the milkmaids of Vrindavan in the Pauranic Age and Meera in the present, experienced. Only he who is freed of all worldly desires, even to the extent of losing the sense of his own physical existence, can attain it.

As the soul pines for union with God, so does He for the soul. The greatest characterisation of it we find is in the *Geeta Govind* of Jayadeva where Krishna seems to be as restless for a meeting with Radha as Radha for him. Symbolically speaking, it depicts the desire of God Himself for reunion with the human soul. Says Krishna to Radha's maid—

Say I am here, oh! if she pardons me,
Say where I am, and win her softly hither.
She goes and tells Radha—
Only go—the stars are setting,
And thy Krishna grieves;
Doubt and anger quite forgetting,
Hasten through the leaves.
Wherefore didst thou lead him heav'nward
But for this thing's sake?
Comfort him with pity, Radha!
Or his heart must break.

God is love, the very embodiment of that supreme idea, ever eager to embrace us, but it is only when by *sadhana* we make ourselves deserving recipients of that sublime love that we experience an external expression of anxiety on His part to meet and to mingle with us. As F. H. Newman said, it is only when we have cultivated in us the feminine qualities of loving and cherishing love, and of resigning ourselves completely to Him, that He spreads forth his arms to take us in His embrace. The milkmaids of Vraj were instinct with these virtues; no wonder, that *gopibhava*, the way of the *gopis*, is considered to be the highest attainment along the path of devotion. 'As the body without soul and the river without water is of no avail, so is a wife without her mate', says Saint Tulsidas. Radha is a devotee nonpareil, for whom life is incomplete without Krishna. The most important attributes of a wife are the intensity of love for her partner and a complete surrender to him. So it is with a devotee. It is only when he surrenders himself completely to God that he is able to taste of *madhuryabhava* which is only a second name for *gopibhava*. It is only to a few, the chosen

ones as we might call them, that this gift of *madhuryabhava* is given. In other words, only those whose love is free from all shades of worldly pleasure and passion are considered worthy of it. Their love is not what we call, in common parlance, sensual craving. Of the large number of people, men or women, residing in Vraj, only the milkmaids had, through their *sadhana*, obtained this privilege.

The *Geeta Govind* has only three characters in it—Radha, Krishna and a lady-messenger or attendant of Radha's. The subject-matter of the book is the pangs of love in separation. The *dutika* plays a very important role in it, for after carrying the messages of the one to the other, not once or twice but repeatedly, she is able ultimately to bring the lovers together. She is like the *guru* who is responsible for uniting the human soul with the Divine.

The book opens with a *sloka* in which it is said that once after Krishna had spent the day frolicking with Radha and her companions, King Nanda, seeing that it was getting dark and apprehending that the boy Krishna might feel frightened to go back alone to his abode in the night, asks Radha to reach him home. In obedience to his command, Radha takes him through the lovely groves of the Yamuna to his house. On the way the intensity of Radha's love for Krishna deepens.

The opening stanzas are followed by two hymns of the poet to Keshava, Lord Krishna, in which he describes how on ten occasions He—the incarnation of Vishnu—was reborn in different shapes and came to the rescue of this earth in distress, and sings the praise of Hari, the Supreme God.

Then follows a description of a collective dance in which Krishna and a number of *gopis* participate.

Radha, seeing her lord in others' company, feels envious and quietly leaves the place and hides herself in a neighbouring grove. She is followed by her companion to whom she expresses her ardent desire to meet Krishna all by herself. Krishna, on the other hand, finds that Radha has disappeared and becomes repentant and restless. He sits in another grove and regrets that he had given her offence and yearns for a reunion. He expresses his intense desire to meet her to Radha's *sakhi* who comes to see him. And then follows a series of conversations between Radha and her companion and between the companion and Krishna. Krishna is delighted to learn that Radha is equally grieved over the separation and equally desirous of reunion with him. 'Come', says the maid, 'for she is sick with love, and thou her only remedy.' Ultimately she is able to bring them together and 'so they met and so they ended. Pain and parting, being blended Life with Life, made one for ever in high love.'

The human soul mingled with the Divine in all its pristine beauty, purity and serenity.

III

In singing of the yearning of the soul for God and of God for the human soul, and depicting this longing in symbol of the *virah* Radha and Krishna, the immortal poet of the *Geeta Govind* has been a pathfinder for other poets to follow. His originality is to be measured by the success of his endeavour. In its lyrical purity, in the intensity of its emotion and drama, in mellifluousness of diction and in richness of imagery *Geeta Govind* remains unsurpassed to the present day. What Valmiki is to poetry, that Jayadeva is to the devotional lyric in Sanskrit. He was, in course of time, followed by a host of poets, particularly in Bengal and Mithila—Vidyapati, Chandidas, Govinddas, Jnanadas, Narottam, Balaramdas and a number of others whose place in Vaishnava literature is fully secured. They walked in his footsteps and composed lyrics of a high order, whose theme was the love of Radha and her lord. Vidyapati and Chandidas, in particular, were poets who had drunk deep at the fountain of Radha-Krishna love. Their lyrics are superb in imagery and most enchanting in expression. They sang with 'full-throated ease' and Radha herself spoke through their song. Of the two, Vidyapati is better known outside Bengal and he has the proud privilege of having secured a high place in both Bengali and Hindi literatures. He was born sometime towards the end of the fourteenth century in Mithila (North Bihar) and was for the longer part of his life at the court of Raja Shiva Singh, being a great favourite of the Raja and his talented wife. His devotional lyrics were so well liked that he was awarded the title of "Navajayadeva" (the new Jayadeva) by the Raja who also gave him the entire village of Bisafi rent-free.

The Raja was quite justified in calling him 'the new Jayadeva' for in the long list of devotional lyric writers if there is one who could be considered the truest successor to Jayadeva it is undoubtedly Vidyapati.

Chandidas, who was born nearly a century ahead of Shri Chaitanya in Bengal, is another poet of great eminence, a master composer of sweet lyrics dealing with the subject of Radha-Krishna love. The great Saint Shri Chaitanya was so enamoured of his songs that he would often sing them himself along with those from Vidyapati and the *Geeta Govind*. Writes a contemporary biographer of his in Bengali:

चंडीदास-विद्यापति, कबिर आनन्दगीति,
जयदेव श्रीगीतगोविन्द,
स्वरूप-रामानंदसने, महाप्रभु रात्रिदिने,
नाचे-गाये परम आनन्द।

"He danced and sang, in the company of Swarup and Ramanand, the songs of Chandidas, Vidyapati, Kabir and the great *Geeta Govind* and obtained immense delight therefrom."

It was, however, left to Govinddas to combine in him all the qualities of the three poets —Jayadeva, Vidyapati and Chandidas; he composed lyrics mostly in a language that was not of Bengal, where he was born, but an admixture of Hindi, Bengali and Maithili called "Brajbuli" in Bengal. In the words of Motilal Das "his lyrics were resplendent with a bright light which takes the reader to a world of music. The harmonic flow of his songs takes us through the different worlds of rich music."

Vidyapati, Chandidas, Govinddas—these were only a few of the scores of poets who were born in the eastern part of this country after Jayadeva and who faithfully followed in his tradition and sang of the love of Radha for her lord. Of the firmament of devotional lyric Jayadeva was undoubtedly the Sun but luminaries like Vidyapati and Chandidas were no less bright. The sky was full of them, but there is no denying that they all drew upon Jayadeva for their splendour.

They all sang of Radha. Says Vidyapa ti's Radha:

Friend: There is no limit to my sorrow. This is the month of Bhadra, and the rains are full but my temple is without its lord.

The storm roars anon and the rains come down all over the earth.

The traveller of my life is cruel and cruel is the God of love, who ever shoots forth his sharp arrows.

The thunders roar and sound and the peacocks dance in glee. The frogs are mad with joy, the coot crows and the heart pants.

The night is awful with dark patches of clouds, lit with flashes of lightning.5

Radha is restless:

She stands a hundred times outside her hut, she comes out and goes back ever and anon.

Anxious is her heart and she heaves a sigh and looks upon the grove of Kadamba.

Why is Radha in such a state?

She does not mind her elders—her cruel superiors.

Has some evil spirit come upon her? She does not keep her skirts in order. She startles now and then—she takes off her ornaments and rearranges them.

She is young in age and the daughter of a prince and withal a newly-wedded wife. I know not for what she pines—I know not her freaks.

It seems from her manner that she is ensnared by the moon in the sky, the dark gem Krishna.

Radha then, in the words of Govinddas, says to her attendant—

Sakhi! Death would be great luck to me.

What pleasure is there in life? First I heard the two syllables, Shyam, and my heart was captured.

I know not who is he that plays upon the flute. It startled me and captivates my ears. I know not whose picture dost thou show. The blazing beauty that surpasses the flow of a fresh rain-cloud thrills my body and whenever I move or start, lost in amazement, it follows me and binds my heart.

Poet Vidyapati then tells her:

Listen, thou winsome princess, listen. I come to tell thee what thou hast done.

Thou hast smitten the heart of Krishna.

Says Krishna, in the words of poet Jadunandan:

Radha is the apple of my eye. She shines in the inmost core of my heart.

She is my all in all. I know not why the lovely-faced one disdains me.

Why did she forsake me? Why did she scorn me? I yearn for her company. I droop and pine.

She, who for a moment's separation speaks, that she has not seen me for an age, she who trembles in fear while in my breast lest she should miss me, how can she scorn me? How can she bear it herself?

Shyam laments in this strain and tears flow down his cheeks.

To this Radha replies, in the words of Chandidas:

Shyam, I shall not forsake thee. I shall keep thee in my heart of hearts—such is my fond desire.

People may laugh and the family ties may break, but still cling to thee I must. Blessed be the Lord who has given thee to me, where else shall I get thee? To whom shall I speak my sorrows and who will believe the torments of my soul? I suffer so much for thy sake; but for thy love, I should have been mad.

At the soft words of Radha, adds Chandidas, Krishna is overcome with joy. "I am thine for thy love. Thy love links me to thy heart," says he.

And thus the poets, following the tradition laid down by Jayadeva, sang of the love that Radha felt for Krishna and Krishna for Radha, and sang at the same time of the craving of the human soul for commingling with God and of God for a reunion with the human soul. Verily these Vaishnava lyrics are a treasure-house of inspiration for the devotees, and their appeal to the heart is supreme.

IV

The *Geeta Govind* inspired not only the poets but painters as well. Sitting amidst the Himalayan ranges, far away from the place where Jayadeva sang his celestial songs, the painters in the valleys of Jammu and Kangra depicted with their brush what poet Jayadeva had done with such exquisite finesse in words in his lyrical compositions. Apart from the fact that they are an example of a very high order of painting, they present before us a very vivid picture of the Radha-Krishna love-drama and are undoubtedly a rich heritage of ours. The paintings that the readers see in this book are from a series of twenty-two illustrating *Geeta Govind* and belong to what is commonly known as the Basohli school of painting. As regards their authorship, nothing definite is known., but on one of the pictures of the series there is a verse written in golden characters in Sanskrit which says that the painter Manaku did the pictorial version of *Geeta Govind* at the instance of Malini, 'who prized her character as her principal wealth' and was a devotee of the Immortal One (Lord Vishnu). From this it can be safely said that the above paintings were done by a painter called Manaku at the behest of a princess of the Royal House of Basohli, named Malini.

Basohli happened to be a small principality amongst the Punjab hill states.[6] The capital city of this state is situated on the bank of the river Ravi. It has a picturesque background about which Vigne, a European traveller, wrote in 1835-39:

"When viewed at a distance of a few miles from the path upwards Jammu, it rises from the dark masses of the lower ranges with a grandeur that I thought not inferior to that of Heidelberg; whilst with reference to general effect, the lines of snowy peaks which are seen peering over the mountains immediately around it, are sufficient to render its relative position immensely superior."

Mr. J. C. French, an authority on art, speaking of Basohli, says:

"The position of Basohli on a steep hill, girt with rocky precipices, overlooking a broad and swiftly flowing river, crowned by one of the loveliest palaces in the hills, and the whole scene framed in the Himalayan Snows, justified its claim to be one of the Seven Wonders of the Hills."

It was quite natural that in surroundings like these the art of painting should have taken deep roots.

Under the patronage of the rulers of this petty state the art of painting flourished here from very early times and developed its own characteristics uninfluenced by the Mughal school. The Basohli paintings have distinctive features and an individuality of their own. They are clearly different from those of the other Pahari paintings, especially in the types of figures depicted and their vigorous masculine style. In the words of Shri V. S. Suri, "they possess large effects, strong colouring, bold drawings and sweeping background." The figures portrayed have a receding forehead, long downward nose, very large eyes, small mouth, receding chin and full cheeks. In short, they look passionate and virile. The colours used are exceedingly brilliant and glowing, lacking the softness of the Kangra school.

Large and alluring lotus eyes are typical of this school of painting, adding greatly to the charm of the figures portrayed.

Another of its characteristic features is that in the case of female figures the drapery is diaphanous. Its transparency is so marked that like the proverbial Dacca muslin the dress does not sufficiently hide the body within—the *choli*, the skirt and the scarf and all. The details of drapery and ornaments as given in these paintings are prominent and decorative. To heighten the decorative effect the painters used beetle-wings, cut into small pieces of various shapes, probably to suggest that they were emeralds, and a number of small pearls. And there is no denying that they do heighten the decorative effect of the pictures. Unlike other Pahari painters the Basohli painters have usually a flat background—probably to concentrate attention more on the object itself than on the background decorations—painted in deep yellow, deep and light green, light maroon and light chocolate colours. Occasionally a fine strip of horizon with the moon is also shown. For the border of the pictures they chose yellow, different shades of red and vermilion. These two are very distinguishing features of the Basohli painters. And in the pictures they use colour with a masterful and organised skill.[7]

Further, the females in the Basohli paintings usually have their tresses loose, and not made into a braid or folded, and in most of the cases a few of the hairs are allowed to keep drooping on the forehead or the cheeks. This is a salient and distinctive feature of the female figures of this school of painting.

The male figures have the upper part of their body bare. The *dhoties* worn are invariably of a golden yellow with a gold border. And they wear lots of jewellery.

Writing on the Buddhist frescoes of India Mr. Percy Brown has said in his book 'Indian Painting':

"With the Hindus, the *mudra*, or symbolism of the hands, is a profound subject and is found occupying a prominent position in all spheres of Indian art. It forms a study in itself, every pose of the hand, every movement of the finger, having a particular significance. In the Buddhist frescoes a somewhat similar object is discernible, these members, full of animation, are made to express a 'finger language' of their own. x x x x The gift of bestowing actual speech was denied to the painter, but all that goes to form a spoken language is seen in the gestures he gave to his fingers."

The Basohli painters followed this tradition very faithfully, in the footsteps of the Ajanta painters who, as the frescoes especially in Cave I show, employed to the fullest extent the use of the "finger language," as Percy Brown would put it, for the expression of thoughts. Obviously the Basohli painting has a good deal of Ajanta influence on it.

The above-mentioned features are very prominently displayed in the paintings that are reproduced in this book. The Basohli school of painting flourished within the four walls of a small hill state; its output naturally was limited. Its masterpieces, in the words of Rai Krishndass, are very rare and scarce. Those reproduced here are undoubtedly of "the finest tradition" of Basohli, again to quote Rai Krishndass, who had a look at them some time ago. They are all 8 inches by 12 inches in size.[8]

The first half of the 18th century may be called the heyday of this school of painting when Rajas like Madini Pal sat on the throne of this tiny hill state. Evidently they were great patrons of art.

Most of the conversations in the *Geeta Govind* are in song and have achieved the plenitude of expressiveness and sweetness. Based on these songs are the paintings that follow.[9] English renderings in verse by Edwin Arnold or George Keyt are also reproduced along with the paintings in order that their beauty may be properly understood and appreciated.

New Delhi. Rajeshwar Prasad Narain Sinha.

EXPLANATORY NOTES

1. Temple dancer, a girl dedicated to the service of Deity.

2. The contribution of the *Geeta Govind* towards the development of Indian drama—especially in Bengal—was also considerable. Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee in his Introduction to *Indian Drama* (The Publications Division) says: 'In Eastern India, for example, we come across a kind of drama with elementary dialogues of two or more actors accompanied by songs, which seems to have made its appearance first in Bengal and Northern Bihar (Mithila) and then to have spread all over Eastern India—Assam and Orissa as well as Nepal. This was a new type, the germs of which are perhaps to be seen in the *Geeta Govind* of Jayadeva."

   In the same book, on page 39, Prabodh C. Sen writes: "Though poetic in form, the *Geeta Govind* can be acted as a play with dance and music. It is the earliest specimen of a primitive type of play that survives in Bengal, and must have preceded regular drama."

   For the contribution of Jayadeva towards music see *Introduction to Indian Music* by Prof. D. P. Mukherjee.

3. "Love for God is a manifestation of the 'hladini' power of God . . . . A soul is impelled on one side by material forces and attractions, and urged upwards by the 'hladini-sakti' of God."—Dr. S. N. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosohpy* Vol. IV, p. 393.

4. जनम-जनम हम रूप निहारिल, नयन न तिरपित भेल।

5. This and a few other quotations that follow are from the English rendering of the original by Dr. Motilal Dass.

6. Basohli happened to be one of the most ancient states of Western Himalayas, a tiny one with a population of about 7,000. Its 400-year-old palace was famous for its rock carvings, grottos and fine sculpture. Its construction began during the reign of Raja Bhupat Pal and its decorations were the work of ten successive generations after him. The Palace, 5-storeyed, was known as the "Wonder of the Hills" in the hilly areas. It is now in ruins. Raja Mahendra Pal had got the walls of a part of this palace decorated in murals done in Basohli "Kalam." They too have perished.

   Painting in Basohli flourished most during the reign of Raja Amrit Pal (1752-1782). Basohli became a tributary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1808-9 and was ultimately given to Maharaj Gulab Singh of Jammu in 1846 when its last chief, Kalyan Pal, was pensioned off. This also meant an end of the Basohli "Kalam."

7. "The additions to the Archaeological section of the Central Museum, Lahore, consist of a series of old paintings of the Basohli school, from a study of which the Curator comes to the conclusion that (1) the Basohli school is possibly of pre-Mughal origin and that (2) the so-called Tibeti pictures are nothing but late productions of the school."

—Archaeological Survey of India Report, 1918-19, Part I.

The use of beetle-wings and pearls probably gave the name 'Tibeti' to these paintings for they are widely used in Tibet for decorative purposes.

Of the series of paintings mentioned above, the best was that which illustrated the *Geeta Govind.* It was divided into two parts when the division of India took place, and 60 per cent of it was retained by Pakistan and the remaining 40 per cent—twenty-two in number—came into the possession of the East Punjab Government.

Many foreign writers on Indian art have referred to the above.

8. Ajit Ghosh, speaking at the Indian Museum in March 1928, very correctly said that the Basohli school was the earliest of the Pahari schools. Ajanta may have inspired it but certainly not the Mughal 'Kalam'. It is of a purely Hindu origin. There are traces of the influence of old Bengal Mall art on it, however.

He further said: "Some of the finest Basohli paintings of the best period—probably seventeenth century—illustrate the immortal Bengal poet Jayadeva's *Geeta Govind.* These paintings are marvellous alike for their fine draughtsmanship and their wonderful colouring and lighting."

The difference between the Basohli 'Kalam' and that of Kangra has been very aptly summed up by an eminent art connoisseur in the following terms: 'Basohli art has the qualities of mural paintings, Kangra art, of the miniature.'

9. Courtesy: The Punjab Government.

Plate I

Vishnu and Lakshmi on 'Sheshnag'

They came to this Earth as Krishna and Radha to show what Love celestial is.

Plate I

Vishnu and Lakshmi on 'Sheshnag'

They came to this Earth as Krishna and Radha
to show what Love celestial is.

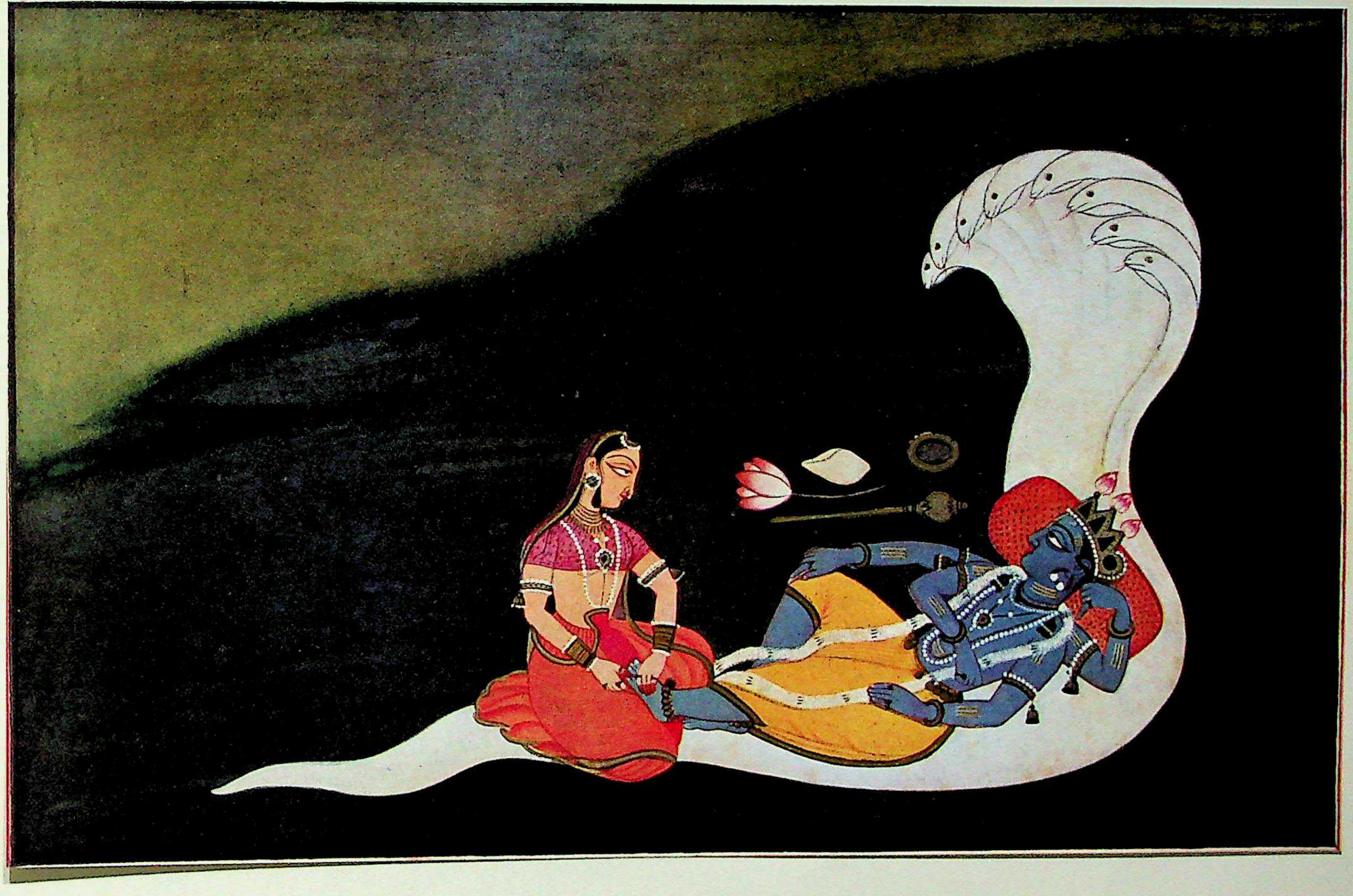


Plate II

Krishna seated with four milkmaids

Radha leaves the place in anger.
Says her lover in remorse——
Radha, Enchantress Radha, Queen of all!
Gone-lost, because she found me sinning here;
And I so stricken with my foolish fall,
I could not stay her out of shame and fear;
She will not hear;
In her disdain and grief vainly I call.

—ARNOLD.

Plate II

Krishna seated with four milkmaids

Radha leaves the place in anger
Says her lover in remorse——
Radha, Enchantress Radha, Queen of all!
Gone-lost, because she found me sinning here;
And I so stricken with my foolish fall,
I could not stay her out of shame and fear;
She will not hear;
In her disdain and grief vainly I call.

—ARNOLD.

Plate III

A conciliation is brought about through the efforts of Radha's mate. Radha and her friend go to meet Krishna...

"Thus followed soft and lasting peace, and griefs
Died while she listened to his tender tongue,
Her eyes of antelope alight with love."
Says Radha's mate to her . . .

Follow, happy Radha! follow—
In the quiet falling twilight—

* * *

For the hours of doubt are over,
And thy glad and faithful lover
Hath found the road by tears and prayers
To thy divinest side;
And thou wilt not now deny him
One delight of all thy beauty,
But yield up open-hearted
His pearl, his prize, his bride.

—ARNOLD.

Plate XI

A conciliation is brought about through the efforts of Radha's mate. Radha and her friend go to meet Krishna...

"Thus followed soft and lasting peace, and griefs
Died while she listened to his tender tongue,
Her eyes of antelope alight with love."
Says Radha's mate to her . . .

Follow, happy Radha! follow—
In the quiet falling twilight—

* * *

For the hours of doubt are over,
And thy glad and faithful lover
Hath found the road by tears and prayers
To thy divinest side;
And thou wilt not now deny him
One delight of all thy beauty,
But yield up open-hearted
His pearl, his prize, his bride!

—[illegible]

Plate IV

Radha and her lover meet again

Krishna paying compliments to Radha says—
Thy brow like smooth Bandhuka-leaves; thy cheek
Which the dark-tinted Madhuk's velvet shows;
Thy long-lashed lotus eyes, lustrous and meek;
Thy nose a Tila-bud; thy teeth like rows
Of Kunda-petals! he who pierceth hearts
Points with thy loveliness all five darts.
Says the Poet Jayadeva—
    So they met and so they ended,
    Pain and parting, being blended
    Life with life—made one for ever
    In high love.

—ARNOLD.

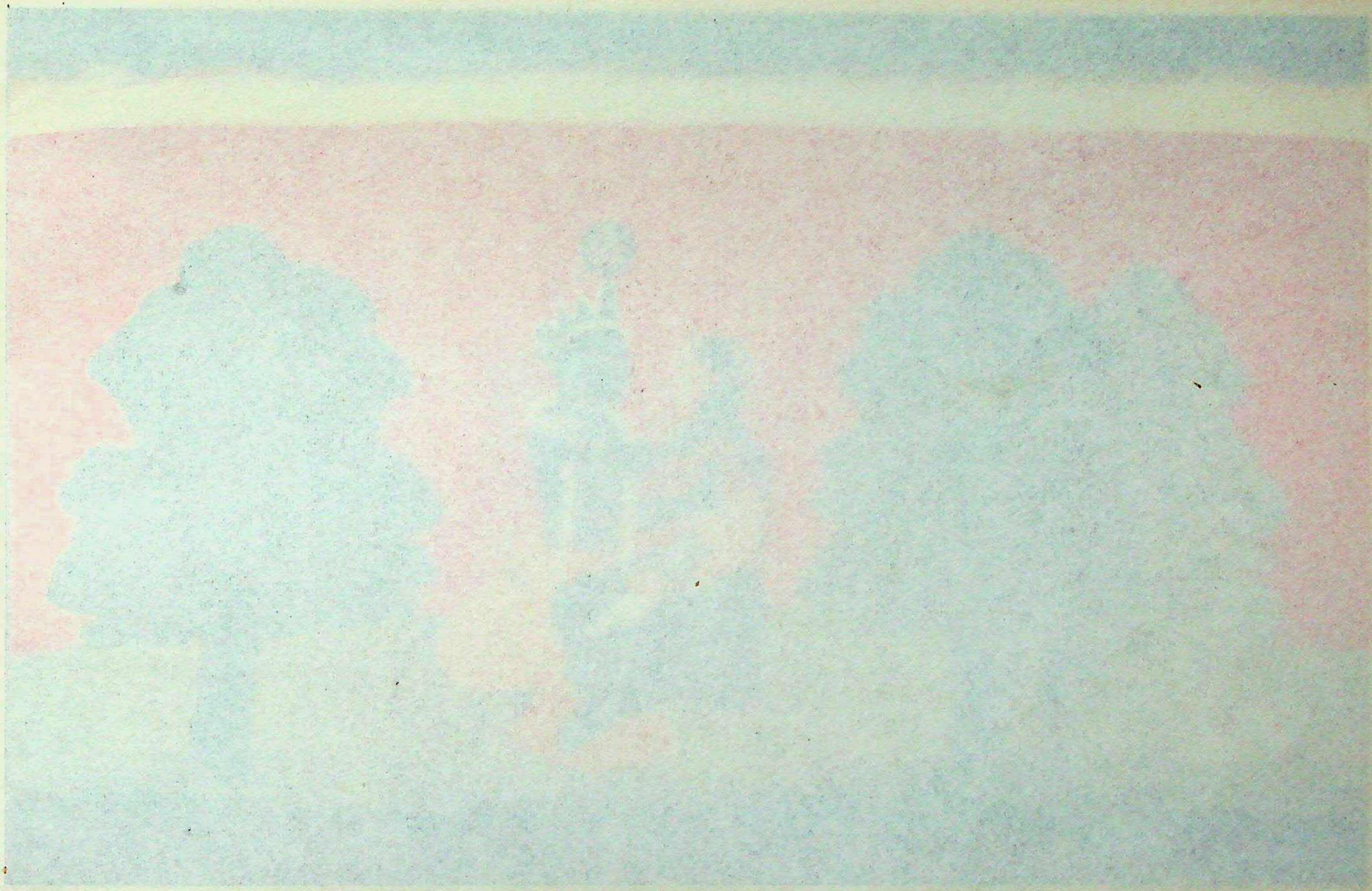


Plate IV

Radha and her lover meet again

Krishna paying compliments to Radha says—
Thy brow like smooth Bandhuka-leaves; thy cheek
Which the dark-tinted Madhuk's velvet shows;
Thy long-lashed lotus eyes, lustrous and meek;
Thy nose a Tila-bud; thy teeth like rows
Of Kunda-petals! he who pierceth hearts
Points with thy loveliness all five darts.
Says the Poet Jayadeva—
    So they met and so they ended,
    Pain and parting, being blended
    Life with life—made one for ever
    In high love.

—ARNOLD.

Plate V

Radha and Krishna in a grove.

* * * Hari looked on his
Sweetheart Radha, she who was amorous,
Her eyes on the couch of flowers,
A smile of desire on her lip,
Radha released of her heavy load of shame,
And he said . . . .

—KEYT.

Plate V

Radha and Krishna in a grove.

* * * Hari looked on his
Sweetheart Radha, she who was amorous,
Her eyes on the couch of flowers,
A smile of desire on her lip,
Radha released of her heavy load of shame.
And he said . . . .

—Keyt.

Plate VI

Says Radha to her lord :

O! delight of the Yadus, depict here
 and make a design, a pattern,
With musk on my breast.

—Keyt.

Plate VI

Says Radha to her lord :

O! delight of the Yadus, depict here
    and make a design, a pattern,
With musk on my breast.

—KDYT.

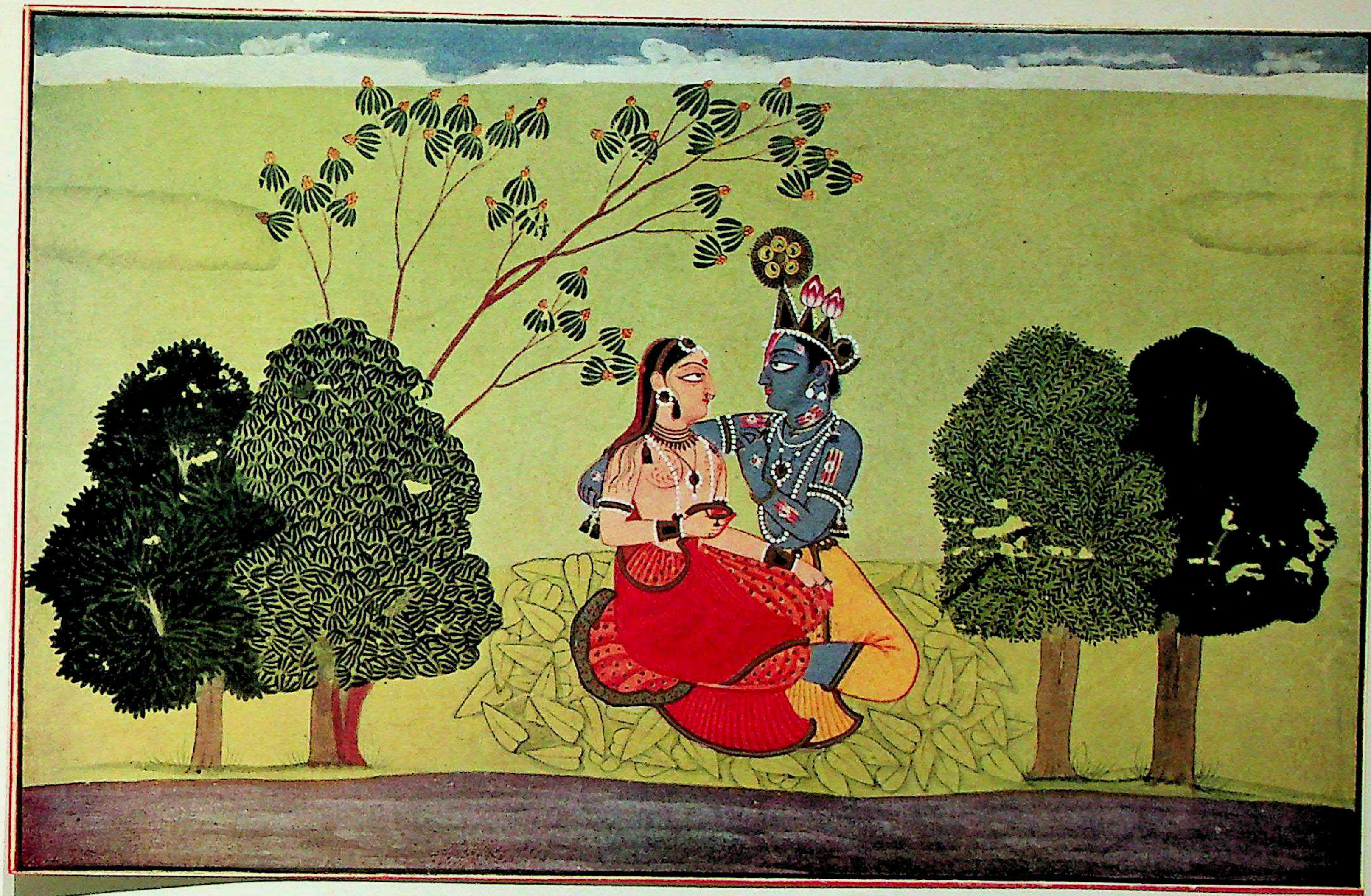


Plate VII

Krishna setting the ear-ring of Radha

O! you apparelled so lovely, wear
    On the lobes of your ears,
Ear-rings which shame
    Your dancing deer-eyes.

—KEYT.

Plate VII

Krishna setting the ear-ring of Radha

O! you apparelled so lovely, wear
On the lobes of your ears,
Ear-rings which shame
Your dancing deer-eyes.

—KEYT.

Plate VIII

Radha and Krishna in amorous play

May pure and unclouded joy and prosperity
Come from the movements of hands of the
Best of Men, amorous hands delighting
in breasts resembling Prayag fruit,
Hands in performance of many forms of amorous
play with Radha besides the Yamuna,
On the bank where coquettish tresses were
weaving, at the tryst where his black
hair mixed with her necklace of pearls,
where the dark Yamuna meets the Ganges'
white stream at Prayaga.

—KEYT.

Plate VIII

Radha and Krishna in amorous play

May pure and unclouded joy and prosperity
Come from the movements of hands of the
Best of Men, amorous hands delighting
in breasts resembling Prayag fruit,
Hands in performance of many forms of amorous
play with Radha besides the Yamuna.
On the bank where coquettish tresses were
weaving, at the tryst where his black
hair mixed with her necklace of pearls,
where the dark Yamuna meets the Ganges'
white stream at Prayaga.

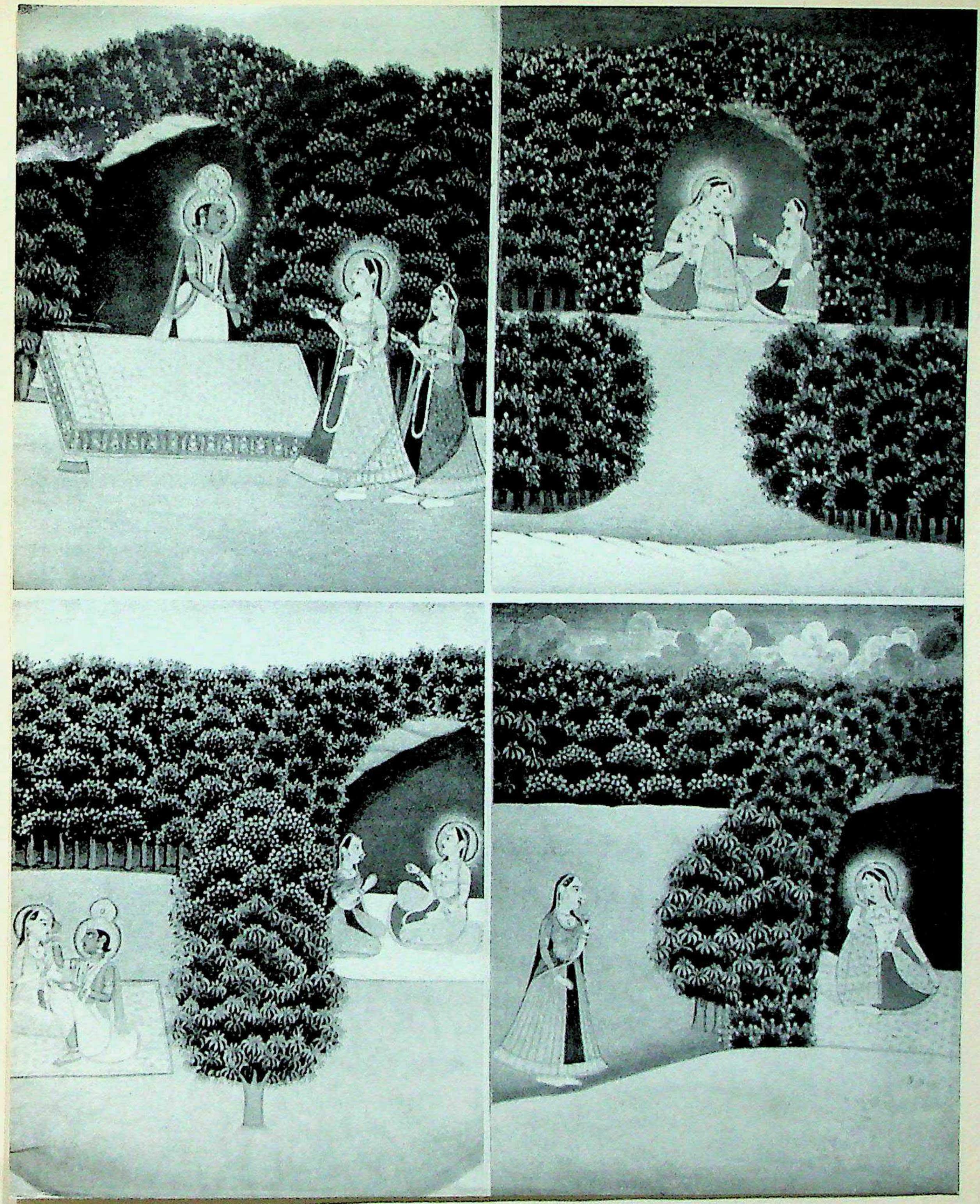
—[illegible]

Plate IX

Four scenes from the Geeta Govind painted in Rajasthani style. They are reproduced here for the purpose of comparison, so that the greater expressiveness of the Basohli paintings is noted.

Plate IX

Four scenes from the Geeta Govind painted in Rajasthani style. They are reproduced here for the purpose of comparison, so that the greater expressiveness of the Basohli paintings is noted.



2127
12.2.65
State Museum, Library, Lko.

103